

# Exercise & Your Heart

## Quick Tips

Many people with heart failure worry about exercising. Some share that they feel scared that exercise might be too much for their (weakened) heart. But research shows, and experts agree, that regular exercise can go a long way to help keep your heart strong and as healthy as possible.

Your care team can talk with you about what exercises are best for you, and how much you should get each week.

Exercise has many health benefits. Being physically active can help **ease your symptoms, improve your heart function** and **help you control your weight**. Being active can also help **boost your energy level, mood and mental outlook**.

Try to get 30 minutes of activity most days. Keep in mind that simply walking more counts. It's important that you feel comfortable with your exercise plan so that you will stick with it.



Exercise can help the heart better (or more efficiently) pump blood. Never start an exercise program without talking with your health care provider first.

## Here are 8 tips to help get you started:

### 1 Start slowly.



Don't overdo it. Pace yourself, pay attention to how you feel and rest when you get tired. You can start by walking just 5 minutes a day and gradually doing more. Even walking up and down a hallway if that makes you feel more at ease helps.

### 2 Look for simple ways to add physical activity to your day.

- Walking instead of driving, when possible.
- Parking your car farther from the store.
- Taking the stairs instead of an elevator if able.
- Walking 5 minutes daily and adding 2 minutes per week until reaching a goal of 30 minutes.
- Tracking your steps each day.



### 3 Mix it up.

Try to get a combination of aerobic and strengthening exercise. Aerobic activity gets your heart pumping. Strengthening and stretching exercises help your muscles get stronger and can improve your balance and coordination.



#### Aerobic exercises

- Walking
- Biking
- Swimming
- Dancing
- Gardening/yard work and some household chores



#### Strength and flexibility training

- Yoga
- Light weights
- Resistance bands
- Using your body weight for resistance – leg raises, push-ups, squats

### 4 Find what works and how to keep at it.

- Pick an activity, or activities, you enjoy.
- Exercise with a friend on certain days so that you're more likely to go.
- Know what gets in the way. For example, if you usually feel drained by the end of the day, be sure to make a date to exercise in the morning or take a walk or stretch during your lunch break.
- Keep an activity journal to celebrate your efforts and share with your care team. There are fitness wristbands or apps to track how many steps you take each day.



### 5 Listen to your body.

Stop exercising and talk with your care team if you notice any:

- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Difficulty breathing
- Heart palpitations – abnormal heart rhythms
- Extreme fatigue



Your provider may recommend you avoid physical activity if you notice swelling or you don't feel well.

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#### Mind the weather.

Stay indoors during the peak hours of heat or humidity, or when temps drop to near freezing. High altitude, bad weather, and poor air quality (heavy pollution or allergens) may worsen your symptoms.



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#### Ask about cardiac rehab.

Ask whether you would be a candidate for cardiac rehabilitation to help you exercise. It can do wonders to build confidence, too.

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#### Think about what makes exercise difficult.

Moving more and keeping your heart strong is a critical part of most heart failure care plans. Talk with your care team about what makes it hard for you to exercise. For example, concerns about how to safely exercise, feeling too tired, cost, no access to a gym, time, etc. Try to find solutions. For example, the YMCA offers scholarships and sliding scales to take part; Silver Sneakers is another program that may help.



#### Questions to ask your care team:

- How much exercise should I aim for, and how much is too much?
- What types of exercises are right for me? Are there activities I should avoid?
- What should my target heart rate be during exercise?
- How much water should I drink while exercising?
- What, if any, symptoms should I watch for during exercise? What should make me stop exercising?
- Do I qualify for a cardiac rehabilitation program?
- I was prescribed nitroglycerin. Should I keep it with me when I exercise?
- What about sexual activity? Can I do it safely?



*What I most want to ask about or focus on when it comes to exercise:*

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